

REMARKS

The specification is amended to remove a reference numeral 47 which does not appear in the drawings.

In the office action dated January 15, 2004, the examiner rejected claim 4 as being anticipated by Fischer et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,099,560). The applicant respectfully disagrees with the examiner's rejection and asks the examiner to reconsider. The examiner states that Fischer discloses the introduction of a liquid composition into an inflatable buoyancy module for ballast. However, Fischer does not teach using inflatable buoyancy modules. Fischer teaches using rigid float cans having open bottoms. Col. 1 ll.54-56, col. 5 ll. 21-23. Although the float cans disclosed in Fischer can be filled by pressurized air to displace water or ballasted by venting air and allowing water to enter by the open bottom, the cans are not inflatable. Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines *inflate* as "to swell or distend with air or gas" and *distend* as "to extend..., lengthen out, to stretch out or extend in more than one direction, to enlarge from internal pressure." The American Heritage Dictionary similarly defines inflate. Clearly, Fischer does not disclosed the claimed invention. The buoyancy cans do not swell, stretch or change size by the introduction of pressurized air.

The present invention, on the other hand, clearly requires inflation. The buoyancy modules have a "fabricated pressure-tight expandable and contractible envelope composed of rubber or rubber-like material." Page 3, ll. 6-8. Further, the buoyancy modules have a deflated condition having a small contracted size which allows the modules to pass through a small deck opening. After passing though the deck opening, the modules are attached to the riser and inflated. Page 4 ll. 10-12 and page 5 ll. 4-7.

The examiner also rejected claims 7-9 as being anticipated by Watkins (U.S. Patent No. 3,858,401), stating that Watkins discloses selective inflating of buoyancy modules. The


applicant disagrees with the examiner's rejection for the same reason as previously discussed – inflatability. Watkins discloses rigid chambers with open bottoms which cannot be inflated. "There are a plurality of airtight shells...to form a plurality of buoyancy chambers 40 which are open at their bottoms. Gas supply means 50 supply selectable amounts of gas from a source on the vessel to each chamber, the introduction of gas into the chambers displacing water therein out through the open bottom of the chambers." Col. 5 ll. 57-66. Even Watkins avoids the use of the term inflate, correctly describing the method as "introducing gas" and "displacing water."

Notwithstanding the inability of Watkin's buoyancy chambers to inflate, Watkins only teaches filling each of a plurality of chambers with a selectable amount of gas, not selectively filling buoyancy chambers. Watkins discloses "a means for restricting gas flow...provided between each chamber and the gas conduit means[,] for providing a generally equal distribution of gas from the gas conduit to the chambers." Col 4. ll. 56-69. That is, all of the chambers are equally filled with a selective amount of air. The present invention, however, discloses and claims selectively inflating buoyancy modules as clearly presented in claim 7, wherein only selective chambers are inflated.

Claims 4 and 7-9 are not anticipated by either Fischer or Watkins. Claims 3-25 are pending in the application. Allowance of claims 3-25 and passage to issue is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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